

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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INFO AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINT AR BL

SUBJ: BOLIVIAN REACTION TO BANZER-PERON MEETING

REF: BUENOS AIRES 8428

1. BOLIVIAN PRESS AND POLITICAL OPINION LEADERS HAVE EXPRESSED GENERAL FEELING OF DISAPPOINTMENT AT LACK OF CONCRETE RESULTS FROM NOVEMBER 12-15 OFFICIAL VISIT BY PRESIDENT BANZER TO ARGENTINA. IN PART, THIS SENTIMENT IS REACTION TO EXAGGERATED PRE-DEPARTURE PUBLICITY, WHICH EMPHASIZED FACT THAT BANZER VISIT WAS FIRST BY LATIN AMERICAN CHIEF OF STATE TO PERON SINCE LATTER'S INAUGURATION AS PRESIDENT. ARGENTINE PRE-VISIT PUBLICITY ON POSSIBLE AREAS OF ECONOMIC AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES ALSO RECEIVED HEAVY PLAY IN BOLIVIAN PRESS.

2. IN AFTERMATH OF VISIT, MANY BOLIVIAN COMMENTATORS ATTEMPTED TO PUT BEST FACE ON INCIDENT BY CITING VARIOUS AGREEMENTS ACHIEVED BY TWO PRESIDENTS, WHILE CRITICIZING SUCH ASPECTS OF ARGENTINE HANDLING OF VISIT AS "DIPLOMATIC ILLNESS" WHICH KEPT PERON FROM ATTENDING FINAL DAY'S CEREMONIES. PREDICTABLY, DOMESTIC OPPOSITION --HEADED BY CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY

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(PDC) -- CRITICIZED FAILURE OF VISIT TO YIELD ANY SPECIFIC

ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR BOLIVIA. MOST LENGTHY ANALYSIS OF VISIT APPEARED IN DAILY NEWSPAPER HOY, WHICH INCREASINGLY REFLECTS OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT VIEWPOINT. THIS ARTICLE TREATED AFFAIR AS A TRIUMPH FOR PRESIDENT BANZER, WHO DEMONSTRATED ABILITY TO TURN DOWN SUPPOSEDLY "INEQUITABLE" ARGENTINE OFFERS FOR BOLIVIAN GAS AND IRON ORE. HOY ARTICLE ALSO POINTED TO SIMULTANEOUS PRESENCE OF BOLIVIAN DELEGATION IN BRAZIL, TO NEGOTIATE AGREEMENT ON SALE OF BOLIVIAN NATURAL GAS, AS SIGN OF BANZER GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO PLAY OFF ECONOMIC AMBITIONS OF ITS TWO POWERFUL NEIGHBORS TO BOLIVIA'S ADVANTAGE.

3. AT SAME TIME, HOWEVER, BANZER-PERON VISIT CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED LACK OF INTERNAL GOB AGREEMENT ON MAJOR ISSUES OF FOREIGN POLICY. FOREIGN MINISTER MARIO GUTIERREZ AND HIS FSB-DOMINATED MINISTRY APPARENTLY MADE LITTLE EFFORT TO ARRANGE PRECISE AGENDA OR REACH AGREEMENT ON SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES WITH ARGENTINE COUNTERPARTS PRIOR TO TRIP. GUTIERREZ HIMSELF, WHILE SERVING AS ACTING PRESIDENT DURING BANZER'S ABSENCE, DESCRIBED PURPOSE OF VISIT AS "STRICTLY PROTOCOLARY", REFLECTING HIS OWN PERSONAL PREFERENCE FOR A BOLIVIAN FOREIGN POLICY ORIENTED PRIMARILY TOWARD BRAZIL. ON THE OTHER HAND, BOTH MNR LEADER VICTOR PAZ ESTENSSORO AND SOME KEY MILITARY OFFICERS INDICATED BEFORE VISIT -- PUBLICLY AND IN PRIVATE -- THEIR DESIRE TO PREVENT ALIGNMENT OF BOLIVIA WITH CHILEAN AND BRAZILIAN REGIMES TO EXCLUSION OF PROFITABLE POLITICO-ECONOMIC TIES WITH OTHER NEIGHBORING STATES. THUS, IN DOMESTIC POLITICAL TERMS, BANZER-PERON ENCOUNTER ONLY ACCENTUATED CURRENT LACK OF AGREEMENT WITHIN RULING FPN COALITION ON BROAD LINES OF BOLIVIAN FOREIGN POLICY, PARTICULARLY VIS-A-VIS KEY BOARDERING COUNTRIES.

4. INTERESTING SIDELIGHT ABOUT ORIGIN OF BANZER VISIT TO ARGENTINA WAS GIVEN TO ARMA BY ARGENTINE MILITARY ATTACHE. ACCORDING TO LATTER, BANZER TOOK ARGENTINE MILITARY ATTACHE ASIDE DURING BOLIVIAN ARMED FORCES DAY (OCTOBER 12) AND SAID THAT IT WAS IMPERATIVE THAT HE BE INVITED BY PERON FOR STATE VISIT TO ARGENTINA IN ORDER TO COMPENSATE FOR "GROWING BRAZILIAN INFLUENCE IN BOLIVIA." THEREAFTER, ARRANGEMENTS PROCEEDED PELL-MELL WITHOUT ANY REAL PLANNING TO THE EXTENT THAT BOLIVIAN DELEGATION ARRIVED IN BUENOS AIRES WITHOUT ADEQUATE PREPARATION OR ANY CLEAR IDEA OF CONFIDENTIAL

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WHAT THEY REALLY INTENDED TO ACCOMPLISH. ARGENTINE MILITARY ATTACHE CHARACTERIZED THE BOLIVIAN DELEGATION'S PERFORMANCE DURING STATE VISIT AS GENERALLY CONFUSED AND DISORGANIZED. STEDMAN

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